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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9624
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY DHAKA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
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SECDEF WASHDC
CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000316

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER, CAMP), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 36

Ref: A) Colombo 310 B) Colombo 307 C) Colombo 304 D) Colombo 299
E) Colombo 294 F) Colombo 287 G) Colombo 282 H) Colombo 279 I)
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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Government claims sufficient medicine has been sent to civilians trapped in the conflict zone; however, ICRC reconfirms that there have been no recent medical shipments. According to UN local staff, LTTE fighters have become reluctant to challenge or fire on large groups of escaping civilians. Many are taking the opportunity to flee; UNHCR reports 3,200 new arrivals from the conflict area during the period March 14-20. USAID officer who traveled to Mannar and Vavuniya on March 16-19 reports possible significant malnutrition among new arrivals, and overcrowded conditions in Vavuniya. End Summary.

IDPs Fleeing Conflict Zone

¶2. (SBU) UNHCR confirms a spike in new arrivals from the conflict zone in the last week (March 14-20), with 3,200 civilians entering Government-controlled territory. The Government reports 48,611 IDPs have fled the conflict area in recent months. A UN contact reported to Defense Attache on March 19 that the remaining local UN staff workers and their families (20 persons) were likely to depart from the conflict zone that night. Twenty-seven UN local staff departed on March 17-18 (nine by boat, who were picked up by the Sri Lankan Navy). According to this contact, these UN local staff report that the LTTE are less committed than before and are losing their will to fight. UN staff reports indicate that the LTTE have become more reluctant in the last few days to challenge or fire on IDPs travelling in large groups vice small groups or families, indicating they realize they could face a widespread revolt. (Comment: This change may be the result of the March 17 retaliation against LTTE by

civilians.) The civilians are using this to their advantage to flee. On March 19, OFDA Regional Advisor witnessed the arrival at Manik Farms, Vavuniya of some 500 civilians newly departed from the conflict area. An OCHA representative in Vavuniya estimates there are still some 150,000-180,000 people trapped in the conflict area.

ICRC Evacuations

¶3. (SBU) The ICRC-leased ferry Green Ocean departed Trincomalee on the evening of March 19 and is expected to bring wounded and sick evacuees from the safe zone to the Indian field hospital in Pulmoddai today (March 20) before returning to Trincomalee. ICRC has undertaken at least 12 evacuation operations since February 11, and has evacuated nearly 5,000 people from the conflict area.

Pressing Needs in Conflict Area

¶4. (SBU) 1,000 MT of food (most of it from the U.S.) have been successfully delivered to the trapped civilians in the last two weeks (March 8-19). 500 MT of food is sufficient to meet food requirements of a population of 143,000 for one week. In addition to safety and food, the most urgent needs of the civilians are water

and medicine. ICRC Deputy Head of Delegation confirms that despite Government assertions, no medical supplies at all have been sent to the conflict area since February 20, and even then it was a small delivery which did not include anesthetics. On March 20 government-owned Tamil daily "Thinakaran" reported that Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe claimed the Government has provided sufficient food and medicine for the trapped population. He further claimed that information regarding shortages of medicines is false LTTE propaganda. He stated that, "during the last three days we have dispatched 52 kinds of medicines, including antibiotics, to the Medical Distribution Center in Trincomalee to be sent through the Sri Lankan Navy to Mullaitivu under the direction Regional Navy Commander." (Note: Embassy will closely monitor whether the supplies are in fact delivered in the coming days.)

USAID Observations on IDP Sites

¶5. (SBU) USAID Food for Peace officer traveled to Mannar and Vavuniya on March 16-19 to view IDP camps and to meet with government officials and representatives of humanitarian agencies. The Medical Superintendent of Mannar hospital who noted to USAID officer that "most of the 178 children recently arriving from the Vanni were malnourished", according to a weight-for-height screening methodology. Unofficial, preliminary results of a UNICEF nutrition survey in the Vavuniya IDP sites indicate high rates of severe wasting and anemia among recent arrivals from the conflict area. Several NGOs are considering providing (with ECHO funding) complementary food items to supplement food rations for the first two weeks after IDPs' arrival. World Food Program confirms that there are enough food stocks currently in Vavuniya warehouses to provide survival rations (1900kCals/person/day) to 100,000 IDPs for a period of one month.

¶5. (SBU) USAID Food for Peace Officer also visited Nellukulam IDP site in Vavuniya, where over 3,000 newly arrived IDPs reside. He noted a marked military presence in the camps and overcrowded conditions. Sanitary conditions were substandard, with no soap and little water near latrines for hygiene. Camp residents expressed concerns to USAID officer regarding medical issues (heart ailments, scabies mentioned among others), diarrhea among children due to change in diet, separation of family members, and lack of work.

Reported Civilian Casualties

¶6. (SBU) Tamil sources from within the LTTE-controlled area report 38 civilians were killed and 90 injured on March 19. These sources report 2,169 arrivals into Government-controlled territory on March 19 of which 1,983 reached Puthukudiyiruppu, 29 reached Jaffna, and 131 (37 males, 28 females, 66 children) were rescued by Navy. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are

frequently exaggerated.)

BLAKE